3.9 Visual Resources

Typically, ***visual resources*** are more conceptual, esoteric, and open to wider interpretation than other resources. They include the scenery and landscapes that, due to their natural features or relatively undisturbed state, have "outstanding or remarkable value" to the general public. Examples of scenic resources could include outstanding natural features, dramatic vantage points, or pristine landscapes (*Hanford Reach Interim Action Plan, August 28, 1998*).

The study area's visual character and quality are primarily natural and rural, defined by rolling as well as steep and dramatic mountain ranges, consistent stretches of sagebrush and rabbitbrush, and agricultural uses including orchards, vineyards and ranches. Its visual character and quality are also defined by dispersed residential areas, existing transmission and generation facilities, the natural beauty of the Columbia River, and the way topography and vegetation relate to the sky and the changing patterns of light throughout the day and year. All of these factors contribute to the area's visual interest and perceived visual quality.

The visual resources for each segment are described below. Visually Sensitive Viewpoint locations are shown on Map 10, *Visual Analysis,* as well as the location of visual simulations.

3.9.1 Visually Sensitive Viewpoints

Three locations that are visually sensitive have been identified due to their visual quality, uniqueness, cultural significance, or ***viewer characteristics***. These areas include:

- **Viewpoint A**, the area near Colockum Pass, due to the number of residences with **foreground** views of the transmission line project;
- **Viewpoint B**, the north face of the Saddle Mountains near the Columbia River and Crab Creek, due to its unique and striking landform, relationship to adjacent water bodies and number of viewers on Route 243; and
- **Viewpoint C**, the Saddle Mountains Ridgeline, due to its striking landform, recreational value and potential impact from a ridgeline transmission line corridor placement.

For Your Information

Visual resources *are the physical features that make up the visible landscape, including land, water, vegetative, and man-made elements (Guidance Material, USDOT, undated).*

The study area is defined as areas within 5 miles of the line segments that contain residences, recreation areas, public lands, and highways, and have a visual connection to the line segment.

Viewer Characteristics

Low Visual Sensitivity refers to most motorists, who would see transmission lines at limited locations from roads that they traverse.

Moderate Visual Sensitivity refers to some recreationalists, such as bird watchers, hikers and/or recreationalists whose activity is specific to a finite geographic location, who are sensitive to man-made structures and their impact on the view of the natural environment.

High Visual Sensitivity refers to residential viewers who own property within 500 ft of the proposed corridors and are concerned about transmission structures and how they impact the view of the natural environment.

Foreground *is within 0.25 to 0.5 mile of the viewer.*

3.9.1.1 Viewpoint A, Colockum Pass

Segment A passes close to a number of residences that have expressed concerns about the visual impact of the project. Viewers would mainly be residents and visitors to the cabins nearby.

Photo 3.9-1. Looking northeast and east along Gage Road towards Colockum Road (Viewpoint A)

For Your Information

*The **middleground** is from the foreground to about 5 miles from the viewer.*

***Photo 3.9-1** has been simulated in Chapter 4, Environmental Consequences, to show a new transmission line. See Photo 4.8-2.*

***Photo 3.9-2** has been simulated in Chapter 4, Environmental Consequences, to show a new transmission line. See Photos 4.8-4.*

3.9.1.2 Viewpoint B, North Face of Saddle Mountains

In this area, Segments D, E, and F would cross natural water bodies and scale the north face of this dramatic, natural landform. These three segments would be clearly visible (primarily in the ***middleground***) to many viewers including residents, tourists, and recreationalists traveling through the area.

Photo 3.9-2. Looking east to Saddle Mountains from Highway 243 (Viewpoint B)

3.9.1.3 Viewpoint C, Saddle Mountains Ridgeline

Due to its striking landform and recreational value, the Saddle Mountains Ridgeline along Segment F is considered a visually sensitive resource. The high quality of the visual environment is due to the

dramatic landform and proximity to Columbia River and Crab Creek, as well as the number of viewers on SR 243, and the presence of residential and tourist viewers in the area. Viewers would mainly be motorists, residents and tourists.

Photo 3.9-3. Looking Northwest towards Saddle Mountain from Wahluke Slope (Viewpoint C)

3.9.2 Segment A

Segment A parallels the Schultz-Vantage 500-kV line through the Kittitas Valley along the edge of rural, agricultural lands and the base of the Wenatchee Mountains. This area is mostly rolling hills of sagebrush and rabbitbrush. Segment A crosses the gentle slope of the Wenatchee Mountains, the YTC, the Middle Canyon at the base of the Boylston and Saddle Mountains, see Map 2, *Alternatives*.

For Your Information

Photo 3.9-3 *has been simulated in Chapter 4, Environmental Consequences, to show a new transmission line. See Photo 4.8-6.*

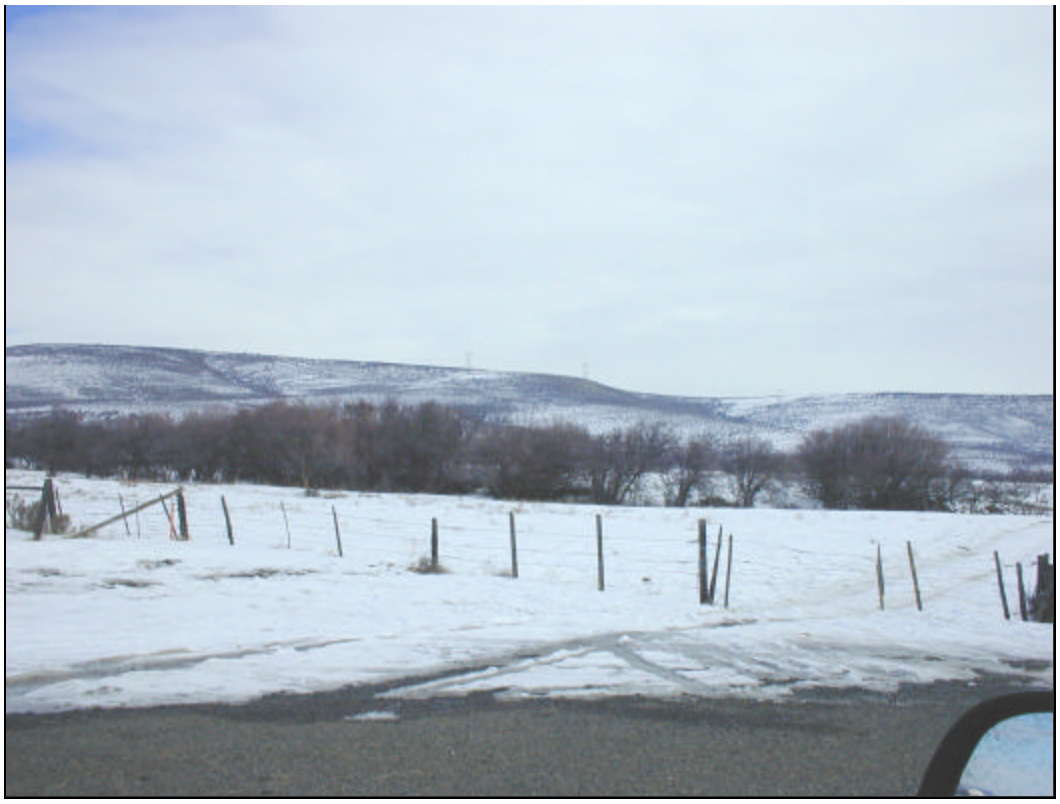

Photo 3.9-4. View from Carlson and Fairview Road looking east

For Your Information

*The **background** is over 5 miles from the viewer.*

Typical views in this area are generally foreground and middleground views of valley agricultural lands, and rolling hills of sagebrush and rabbitbrush. ***Background*** views are of the Wenatchee, Boylston, and Saddle Mountains and sky.

Viewers would be residents of the low-density, scattered valley homes, dispersed recreationalists, and motorists on Vantage Highway, Highway 90, Colockum, and other rural roads in the area. Approximately 25 residences occur within 500 feet of the line segment.

***Photo 3.9-5** has been simulated in Chapter 4, Environmental Consequences, to show a new transmission line. See Photo 4.8-1.*

Segment A would generally be in the background and adjacent to the existing Schultz-Vantage 500-kV transmission line, or at or near the base of the surrounding mountain ranges.

Photo 3.9-5. View of Schultz-Vantage transmission line crossing of Vantage Highway (View 1 on Map 9)

For Your Information

Photo 3.9-5 *has been simulated in Chapter 4, Environmental Consequences, to show a new transmission line. See Photo 4.8-1.*

Photo 3.9-6. Aerial view of Schultz-Vantage Middle Canyon approaching the Columbia River

3.9.3 Segment B

Option B_{NORTH} – Option B_{NORTH} would parallel the existing Schultz-Vantage 500-kV transmission line down Middle Canyon to the Columbia River, passing gently rolling sagebrush and rabbitbrush, steep cliffs, the Columbia River to the Vantage Substation (Map 2, *Alternatives*). Although numerous lines converge here, the substation is generally out of view due to its location to the east and up-slope from Route 243.

In Middle Canyon, the Schultz-Vantage 500-kV line is typically out of view, but emerges at the east end of the canyon and cuts perpendicular across the Columbia River, becoming visible although not dominating the view for motorists on Route 243. It is part of the foreground with the Columbia River and Wanapum Dam, and middleground with the Columbia River, its adjacent bluffs, the Saddle Mountains, and sky.

Viewers would be motorists on Route 243 and other rural roads in the area, residents of the low density, scattered homes, dispersed recreationalists and visitors of the Wanapum Dam.

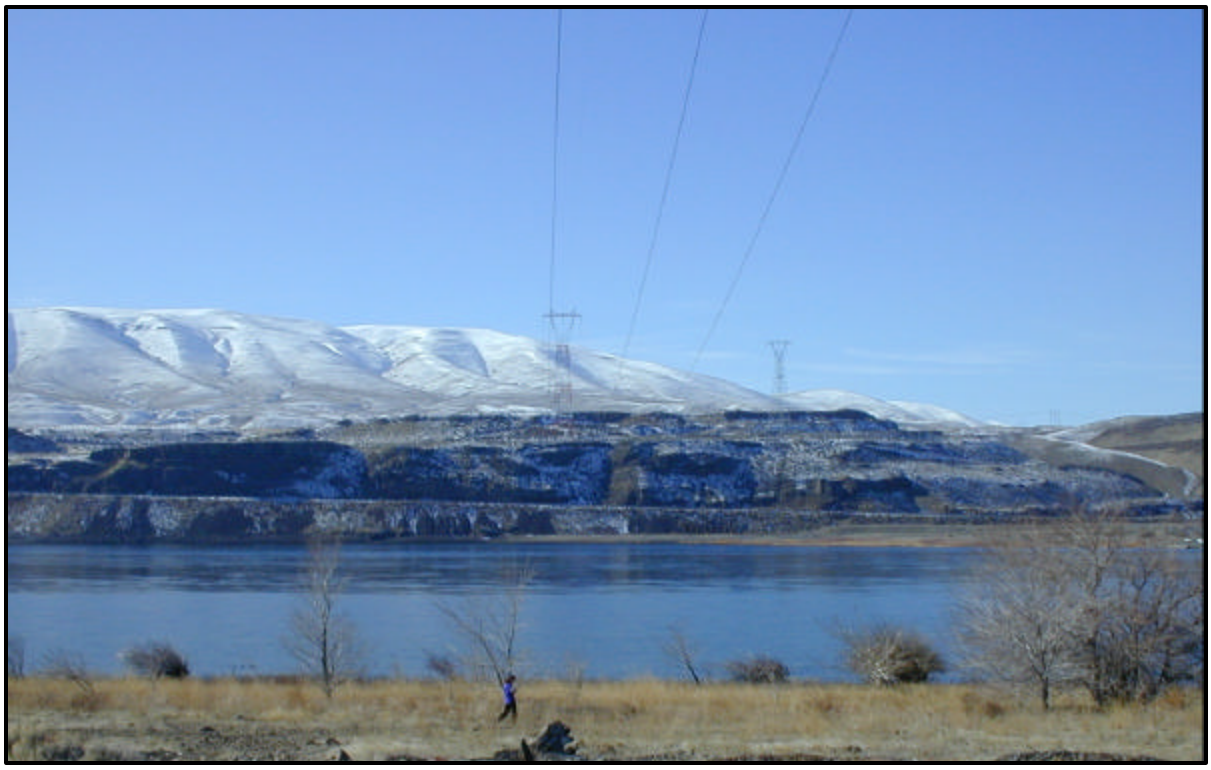

Photo 3.9-7. Existing Schultz-Vantage transmission line crossing of the Columbia River looking west toward the Saddle Mountains (View 2 on Map 9)

Option B_{SOUTH} – This line option begins as the same alignment as the north end of Segment C, travels south approximately 1 mile, then turns east and runs down Middle Canyon to the Columbia River, where it would parallel the Vantage-Raver line on the south side.

In Middle Canyon, the existing ROW is typically out of view from most viewers except where it emerges at the east end of the canyon and cuts perpendicular across the Columbia River. In this area, it would be visible, yet, not dominant in the view, to motorists on Route 243 as part of the foreground with the Columbia River and Wanapum Dam and middleground with the Columbia River, its adjacent bluffs, Saddle Mountains and sky. Recreational users of the John Wayne Trail would also have foreground views of the new line for the first two miles, just east of Segment C.

Viewers are motorists on Route 243 and other rural roads in the area, residents of the low density, scattered homes, dispersed recreationalists and visitors of the Wanapum Dam.

3.9.4 Segment C

Segment C would require new ROW across the YTC. The YTC is comprised of four parallel basaltic ridges, with associated valleys that run northwest to southeast. Topography at the YTC varies from low plains to escarpments, and tends to be more rugged in the eastern portions that drain to the Columbia River. Vegetation is typically dominated by sagebrush and rabbitbrush.

Photo 3.9-8. View from Route 24 looking north towards Yakima Ridge

Segment C would cross steep, rugged terrain of big sagebrush and grassland areas, the crest of the western portion of the Saddle Mountains Ridge, the steep, rugged terrain of the four parallel basaltic ridges, the Yakima Ridge, rolling terrain of sagebrush and grasslands, and orchards and vineyards (Map 2, *Alternatives*).

Photo 3.9-9. Aerial view of eastern edge of Yakima Training Center looking South

Segment C would be remote from most potential viewers, although tribal users and dispersed recreationalists are sometimes permitted into areas of the YTC. Segment C could potentially be visible as it crosses Yakima Ridge in the background from SR 243, but would not be dominant in the view. At the southern end of this segment, the proposed route would become visible to motorists for a short distance, as it crosses SR-24 on its way to the new Wautoma Substation.

3.9.5 Segment D

Segment D would parallel or replace the existing Vantage-Midway 230-kV line from the Vantage Substation up and over the Saddle Mountains, down through rolling range land, across heavily used agricultural areas on the Wahluke Slope, through the western corner of the Saddle Mountains Unit of the Hanford Reach National Monument, and over the Columbia River to the Midway Substation. South of the Midway Substation, it would parallel the existing Big Eddy - Midway 230-kV line up the steep slope of the Umtanum Ridge, across rolling, sagebrush, grassland and agricultural areas, and up and over the Yakima Ridge to the proposed Wautoma Substation (Map 2, *Alternatives*).

Due to the length of Segment D and the diversity of terrain and viewers, smaller portions of the segment are discussed in more detail below.

3.9.5.1 Wanapum Dam/Vantage Substation to Crab Creek

This area generally consists of foreground and middleground views of sagebrush, grasslands, orchards, transmission lines, and the Columbia River and background views of the surrounding mountains and sky. Viewers would be the few residents of Beverly and Schwana, motorists on Highway 243, some dispersed recreationalists who use the Columbia River and adjacent areas, and dedicated recreationalists at the Wanapum Dam. Four residences are within 500 feet of the proposed ROW.